

THE ROLLA EXPRESS.

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3m13

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UNFORGOTTEN WORDS.

[Concluded.]

"You are not well this evening," said Mrs. Lewis, as she looked at her son's changed face across the tea-table, and noticed that he did not eat.

"My head aches," he replied, as he turned partly round away from his mother's direct gaze.

"Perhaps the tea will make you feel better."

"I'll lie down on the sofa in the parlour for a short time," said the young man, rising from the table.

"Quiet may give relief." And he went from the dining room.

Mrs. Lewis followed him into the parlour in a little while, and sitting down by the sofa on which he was lying, placed her hand upon his head. Ah, it would take more than the loving pressure of a mother's hand to ease the pain from which he was suffering. The touch of that pure hand only increased the pain to agony.

"Do you feel better?" asked Mrs. Lewis, after she had remained for some time with her hand on his forehead.

"Not much," he replied; and rising as he spoke, he added, "I think a walk in the open air will do me good."

"Don't go out, James," said Mrs. Lewis, a troubled feeling coming into her heart.

"I will only walk a few squares." And James went into the parlour, and, taking up his hat, passed into the street without another word.

"There's something more than the headache the matter with him," was the thought of Mrs. Lewis, and the slight feeling of trouble that she had experienced began deepening into a strange concern that involved a dread of the coming evil.

For half an hour James walked without any purpose in his mind beyond escape from the presence of his mother. Every phase of Mr. Carman's manner toward him after the receipt of that letter, was reviewed and dwelt on, in order if possible, to determine whether suspicion of wrong dealings was entertained.

At last his aimless walk brought him into the neighborhood of Mr. Carman's store, and in passing he was surprised at seeing a light within. "What can this mean?" he asked himself, a new fear creeping with its shuddering impulses into his heart.

"He went near and listened by the door and windows, but could hear no sound within. "There's something wrong," he said. "What can it be? if this thing is discovered! what will be the end of it? Ruin, ruin! My poor mother!"

The wretched young man passed on, and walked the streets for two hours, when he returned home. His mother met him at the door, as he entered, and inquired with unconcealed anxiety if he were better. He said "Yes," but with a manner that only increased the trouble she felt, and passed up hastily to his room.

In the morning the strangely altered face of James, as he met his mother at the breakfast table, struck alarm into her heart. He was silent and evaded all her questions. While they still sat at the table the door-bell rung loudly. The sound startled James, and he turned his ear to listen in a nervous way, which did not escape the observation of his mother.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Lewis, as the servant came back from the door.

"A gentlemen wants to see James" replied the girl.

James arose instantly, and went out into the hall, shutting the dining room door as he did so. Mrs. Lewis sat, in almost breathless expectation, awaiting her son's return. Then he returned along the hall to the street door, and she heard it shut. All was now silent. Starting up, she ran out into the passage, but James was not there. He had gone with the person who called for him, and without a word!

Ah, that was a sad going away! Mr. Carman had spent half the night in examining the accounts of James and discovered frauds to the amount of over six thousand dollars. Blindly indignant, he had sent an officer to arrest him early in the morning, and it was with this officer that the unhappy boy went away from his home never to return again.

"The young villain shall lie in the bed he has made for himself!" exclaimed Mr. Carman in his bitter indignation. And he did not hold back in anything, but made the exposure of the young man's crime complete. On the trial he showed an eager desire to have him convicted, and presented such an array of evidence that the jury could not give any other verdict than "guilty."

The poor mother was in court, and audible in the silence that followed came her convulsive sobs upon the air. The presiding judge then addressed the culprit, and asked if he had anything to say why the sentence of the law should not be pronounced on him. All eyes were turned upon the pale agitated young man, who arose with an effort, and leaned against the railing by which he stood, as if needing support.

"Will it please your honors," he said, "to direct Mr. Carman to come a little nearer, so I can look at him and your honors at the same time?"

Mr. Carman was directed to come forward to where the boy stood. There was a breathless silence in the court-room as the prosecutor obey'd the order, and came forward so as to be in the eyes of all. James looked at him steadily for a few moments and then turned to the judges.

"What I have to say, your honors is this,"—he spoke calmly and distinctly—"and it may, in a degree, extenuate, though it cannot excuse, the crime. I went to that man's store an innocent boy; and if he had been an honest man I would not have stood before you to-day a criminal."

Mr. Carman interrupted the young man and appealed to the court for protection against allegations of such an outrageous character; but he was peremptorily ordered to keep silent.

James went on in a firm voice, "Only a few weeks after I went in his employment I examined a bill, and found an error of twenty dollars." The face of Mr. Carman crimsoned instantly.

"You remember it, I see," remarked James. "and I shall have cause to remember it as long as I live."

The error was in favor of Mr. Carman, and I asked him if I should correct the mistake. His reply was, 'We don't examine bills for other people's benefit!' It was my first lesson in dishonesty, and I never forgot the words. I saw the bill settled, and saw Mr. Carman take twenty dollars that was not his own. I felt shocked at first; it seemed such a wrong thing. But soon after he called me a simpleton for handing back to the teller of a bank fifty dollars overpaid on a check; and—

"May I ask the protection of the court?" said Mr. Carman.

"Is it true what the lad says?" asked the Judge.

Mr. Carman hesitated, and looked confused. All eyes were on his

face; and jury, lawyers and spectators felt certain that he was guilty of leading him astray.

"Not long afterward," resumed young Lewis, "in receiving my wages. I found that Mr. Carman had given me fifty cents too much. I was about giving it back to him, when I remembered his remarks about letting people correct their own mistakes, and said to myself, 'Let him correct his own errors,' and dishonestly kept the money. Again the same thing happened, and again I kept the money that did not of right belong to me. This was the beginning of evil, and here I am! Mr. Carman has shown an eagerness to convict and have me punished, as the court have seen. If he had shown me any mercy I might have kept silent. But now I interpose the truth, and may it incline you to show some consideration for the unhappiest being alive."

The young man covered his face with his hands, and sat down overpowered by his feelings. His mother, who was near him, sobbed aloud and bending over, laid her hands on his head, saying—

"My poor boy!"

"There were few eyes in the court room undimmed. In the silence that followed, Mr. Carman spoke—

"Is my character to be thus blasted on the word of a criminal, your honors? Is this just? Is this the protection a citizen finds in the court-room?"

"Your solemn oath that this charge is untrue," said the judge, "will place you all right. It was the unhappy boy's only opportunity, and the court felt bound in humanity to hear what he said."

James Lewis stood up again instantly and turned his face and dark piercing eyes on Carman:

"Let him take that oath if he dare!" he exclaimed.

The counsel for prosecution now interfered and called the proceeding an outrage on all justice, and unheard of before in a court-room. But the judge commanded order, and then said—

"The Court offers you the only way of reparation in its power.

Your oath will scatter the allegation of a criminal to the winds. Will you swear?"

Mr. Carman turned with a distressed look toward his counsel, while James kept his eyes fixed upon him. There was a conference, and the lawyer said:

"The proceeding is irregular, and I have advised my client to make no response. At the same time he protests against it as an outrage upon the rights of a citizen."

The Judges bowed, and Mr. Carman withdrew. After a brief conference with his associates, the presiding judge said, addressing the criminal: "In consideration of your youth, and the temptation to which in tender years you were unhappily subjected, the court gives you its lightest sentence, one year's imprisonment. At the same time, in pronouncing this sentence, let me warn you solemnly against any further steps in the way you have taken."

Crime can have no valid excuse. It is an evil in the sight of God and man, and leads only to suffering. And when you come forth again from your brief incarceration, may it be with a resolution to die rather than commit another crime!"

And the curtain fell on that sad scene in the boy's life. When it lifted again and he came forth from prison a year afterward, his mother was dead. From the day her pale face faded from his vision, as he passed from the court, he never saw her again. Ten years afterward, a